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## General Principles for Direct Mail Appeals

1. Personalize the letter. All of your strongest competitors for contributions address their supporters individually, which is quite easy to do with today's mail-merge programs, even in-house. The "Dear Friend" approach is no longer adequate.
2. Write with an individual in mind. Image you are writing to one, single, real person whom you personally know. This will immediately eliminate the use of collective nouns that signal an impersonal appeal, such as "Dear friends", and "Together with you, our community partners". These collective nouns make little sense, since only one person at a time will read the letter.
3. Be passionate. Kill committee-written letters. The "voice" of whoever signs the letter – his or her personal passion for the work of the organization – should come through in the writing.
4. Remind the recipients of your results. Let donors feel that their past giving made a difference in helping you reach your shared goals. Give non-donors a feeling for what you could accomplish if they gave. Of course, this means you have to segment your mailing list.
5. Segment the mailing list. That information you've been collecting in your database actually has a use. Tailor your letter based on your knowledge of the recipient – their giving history, volunteer involvement, age, place of residence, interests, or any other meaningful characteristic.
6. Let the people you serve speak for themselves. Pick a great quote or testimonial from someone whose life has been improved by your work to include in the letter. Look for and collect these comments throughout the year.
7. Ask directly and suggest an amount. Make it clear that the purpose of the letter is to ask for a gift. Suggest an amount. For prior donors, base the amount on giving history.

8. Only ask for a gift. Asking for anything else – feedback, volunteers, referrals – gives the recipients an “out”. Why should they give when you’d be just as happy with some advice on how to run your organization?
9. Save the thank you for after the gift. Thank them for their time or consideration if they’ve made it to the end of the letter, not for a gift they haven’t made. For most donors, a thank you is all they expect for their gift. If you’ve already given it, why should they bother?
10. Include a postscript. Repeat the essence of the letter: Give now! And set a deadline.